



Honoring America's Veterans

No veteran should ever have reason to doubt America's gratitude for his or her service to the nation and to the cause of freedom. Iowa's veterans deserve nothing less than our highest gratitude, our deepest respect and our strongest support.

This Memorial Day, Americans have a deeper understanding of the sacrifices of our military personnel than at any time in recent history. So let us honor our veterans not just by attending picnics and parades, but also by understanding the sacrifices they made and the history they left behind.

I hope this information about the history of Memorial Day and the proper display of the American flag adds to your remembrance of America's veterans.

The History of Memorial Day

Memorial Day was originally known as Decoration Day because it was a time set aside to honor the nation's Civil War dead by decorating their graves. It was first widely observed on May 30, 1868, to commemorate the sacrifices of Civil War soldiers, by proclamation of General John A. Logan of the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of former sailors and soldiers.

It is widely assumed that Memorial Day was added to the list of federal holidays in 1888 because so many federal employees were members of the Grand Army of the Republic. It was the feeling of Congress at the time that people who were paying their respects to those who died in service to their nation, should not have to lose a day of wages -- therefore they created the federal holiday.

With the passage of the Monday Holiday Law in 1968, the observance of Memorial Day was permanently changed from May 30 to the last Monday in May.

Displaying The Flag

The Federal Flag Code provides uniform guidelines for the display of and respect shown to the flag. The following are excerpts of the Code:

Universal custom to display the flag only from sunrise to sunset on buildings and on stationary flagstaffs in the open. However when a patriotic effect is desired, the flag may be displayed 24 hours a day if properly illuminated during the hours of darkness.

The flag should not be displayed on days when the weather is inclement, except when an all-weather flag is displayed.

The flag should be displayed on all days, especially Memorial Day, the last Monday in May, where it should be flown at half staff until noon.

When the flag is displayed either horizontally or vertically against a wall, the union should be uppermost and to the observer's left. When displayed in a window, the flag should be displayed in the same way, with the union or blue field to the left of the observer on the street.

The flag should never touch anything beneath it, such as the ground, floor, water, or merchandise.

The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning.

If you would like a flag that's been flown over the Capitol, you can purchase one by visiting my website at <http://harkin.senate.gov>.